

The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University
Ohio State Engineer

Title: The Bookshelf Speaks

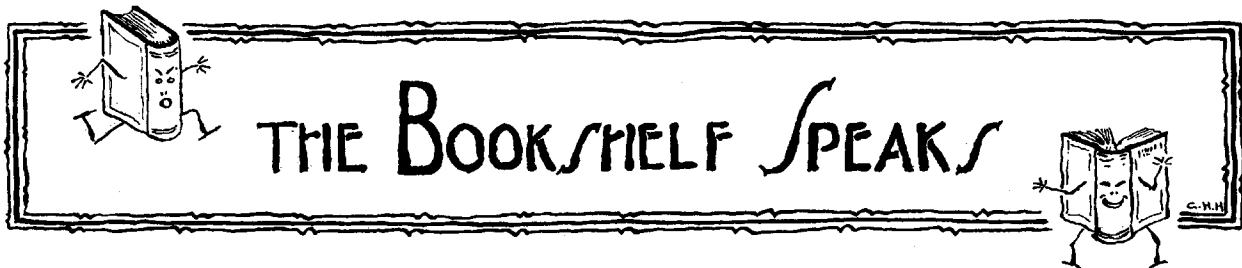
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THE BOOKSHELF SPEAKS

IF this department survives much longer we'll have to call it the Bookcase!

At any rate this particular shelf feels just a trifle like yawning, with no excuse whatsoever inasmuch as three very pleasant books were added during the summer.

Donne Byrne gets our bouquet this month. First for *Messer Marco Polo*, which in spite of the fact that it has been in print for years, just came to my attention. We mentioned fairy stories last year and here is another of the first water. If you ever traveled a thousand miles in the hope of meeting someone you had no assurance of even seeing, if you ever experienced a mortal conflict between acknowledged duty and a desire that lay close to your heart, if you ever tried to chase a rainbow,—in short, if you ever fell in love, you'll like *Messer Marco Polo*. I missed a good meal by starting the book a half hour before dinner time! It is short, too short you'll think when Marco Polo starts back home, with a well marked climax that cannot fail to give you a real thrill unless you're absolutely sterile.

The second excuse for Donne Byrne's bouquet is *O'Malley of Shanganah*. Not quite so short as *Messer Marco Polo*, nor having quite so much lyric abandon, it is still a very worthwhile piece of writing that bears Mr. Byrne's characteristic portraiture of old Ireland. Just as Conrad's *Lord Jim* is the story of a cowardice, so this is the story of a lie. It starts a trifle slowly but soon takes hold and you'll find yourself "just finishing this chapter" for the rest of the book. It has an abrupt ending that left me turning blank pages looking for the rest of it; the sort that makes you feel like settling back, striking a match to the old pipe and thinking, "Well, guess that's about the only way it could have ended at that."

Quite in contrast to the foregoing is *South Wind*, another book published some ten years ago and only recently introduced to the American public through the Modern Library, of whose editorial perspicacity the Bookshelf has spoken before. Completely sophisticated, it deserves to rank its author, Norman Douglas, well up among those we think of in connection with sophistication, Huxley, Van Vechten, Andrews. Arlen, and others. It is first and last a story of the south wind, the enervating sirocco which fans the island of Nepenthe to sleep at siesta time and so affects the minds of a dozen interesting people that they become even more interesting under its subtle tropical influence. Murder, robbery, forgery and bribery are welcomed diversions during the "dull" season. The troublesome Russians must be periodically jailed, and something even had to be done about Miss Wilberforce, who under sufficient alcoholic stimulation was addicted to the annoying habit of divesting herself of her raiment and walking the streets at midnight. A criticism which we feel obliged to add is that *South Wind* reads as though it had been written almost too easily, and without the sharp intensity that must accompany the deliverance of any truly great piece of work.

Villa Cather sponsored a book this summer—*The Professor's House*—which might be of interest to some of us, since it contained a picture of a professor who seemed strangely familiar, although no names were mentioned. The story concerns the college career of a boy, Tom Outland, who was beset by brains to the extent of becoming world famous almost over night. It might be worthwhile noting here that it seldom happens in practice, so one need worry very little over the matter. Soon after college Tom was killed in the war, from which point the story drifts on to a vague conclusion. The outstanding thing about the story is the account of Tom Outland's life in the far West. This has that dreamy, mystical air, so much desired by novelists and said, by those who have been there, to be all bunk. The old professor seems to be only slightly ossified, rather human and really likable, even though he did write Spanish histories. The women in the story are not interesting, resembling some that we know.

Another flower from the ink tree, this time a dark purple and gray, called "Wanderings," written by Robert Herrick, tells of people who are not properly adjusted to their surroundings, who seek a mystical something, they know not what, and sometimes find it. There are four short stories in the book, namely, Magic, The Stations of the Cross, The Adventures of Ti Chatte, and The Passions of Trotsky. Of these, Magic and The Adventures of Ti Chatte are the most interesting. In Magic the characters are all strangers to their environment, not knowing themselves, while being very sophisticated. The story is allegorical, telling of a man's love for his ideal type of woman. The fact that the woman's charm is only fancied gives it a sort of unreality, strictly in accord with the author's purpose, granting that authors have purposes. In Ti Chatte, a young man, a grey kitten and the inevitable girl are marooned on a quarantine island in the tropics. The ensuing events are withall rather amusing, although not epoch making. Ti Chatte should have been placed at the end of the book, so that after leading the reader through a maze of allegory, the author could have left the reader on the tropical island. This shall be suggested to the author.

"Ransom." by Anthony Richardson, strikes a new note on the scale of reparations, since it gives the details as to what a sophisticated go-getter has to give up when he marries a sweet young thing of seventeen. It is interesting reading and has same rather pungent philosophy in it. As a study of emotions, it gives brilliant examples of almost all of them. The said emotions are all analyzed so that the student will not need his lab. manual to read and enjoy it.

If you will read a few of these new books, you will find much that is good and beautiful, also some that is not. Try reading a chapter or two before each eight o'clock and you will soon learn to appreciate the restful and homelike atmosphere usually found in the early morning classes.